

Panel explores renewable energy options

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A panel including national experts met Friday as part of the Utah Energy Forum to address policies, programs and incentives that would help Utah to reap the benefits of its renewable energy resources.

As the Beehive State experiences strong growth in population and energy needs, analysts are working to highlight the possibilities for increased energy efficiency and renewable energy development.

"Utah's energy demand continues to grow exponentially, and the energy sector is faced with growing risks and uncertainties," said Sarah Wright, executive director of Utah Clean Energy, a nonprofit group that promotes clean energy use. "Utah's renewable-energy and energy-efficiency resources present a tremendous opportunity to help meet our energy needs while creating a more secure and sustainable energy path for Utahns."

The panel, hosted by Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.'s office, is also tasked with developing strategies that focus on the economic potential and benefits of pursuing renewable energy resources, along with the policies needed to drive those developments, said Sara Baldwin, community programs coordinator for Utah Clean Energy.

Renewable-energy resources are "helping to diversify (the state's) energy portfolio, reducing our reliance on finite resources, mitigating carbon risk, providing price and overall system stability, and cleaner air and cleaner water," said Baldwin.

She said the state has made of point of trying to reduce Utah's "carbon footprint" as the state attempts to lower greenhouse-gas emissions and promote the increased used of alternative energy resources, including solar and wind power, and geothermal energy.

Geothermal energy is energy generated by heat stored beneath the Earth's surface. According to the Western Governors Association, Utah has about 230 megawatts of developable geothermal energy resources. The resource map runs from the southwest part of the state up to the northeastern corner, said Paul Thomsen, public policy manager for Ormat Technologies, Inc.

"One megawatt of geothermal energy is enough power for 800 homes," Thomsen said. "That's serious energy."

He said geothermal energy has zero emissions, zero carbon dioxide and zero water consumption — giving it the lowest total carbon footprint of any renewable energy resource.

Wind power was also among the top renewable energy sources discussed at the forum.

Larry Flowers, Wind Power America program director for National Renewable Energy Laboratories, said Utah has the potential to generate about 2,500 megawatts of electricity from wind, mostly from wind harnessed in the south and western parts of the state. He said that would translate into enough energy to power about 750,000 homes. Wind power also could bring the state about \$3 billion in overall economic development, he added.

The development of wind power would result in jobs and increased tax revenue for state coffers, as well as payments to local landowners because energy producers lease land to develop projects.

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